

## GAMING MACHINE AND METHOD WITH GROUP GAMING MODE

### FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to gaming systems and to gaming machines through which players may participate in wagering games, and in particular gaming machines including group games.

### BACKGROUND

[0002] Many different types of gaming machines have been developed to provide various formats and graphic presentations for conducting games and presenting game results. For example, numerous mechanical reel-type gaming machines, also known as slot machines, have been developed with different reel configurations, reel symbols, and paylines. More recently, gaming machines have been developed with video monitors that are used to produce simulations of mechanical spinning reels. These video-based gaming machines may use one or more video monitors to provide a wide variety of graphic effects in addition to simulated spinning reels, and may also provide secondary/bonus games using different reel arrangements or entirely different graphics. Many video-based gaming machines have three or five spinning reels that may be stopped to display a matrix of game symbols. The symbols displayed on the stopped reels correlate to a result of the game. Video-based gaming machines may also be used to show card games or various types of competitions such as simulated horse races in which wagers may be placed.

[0003] Group games are used with slot machines to improve the variety of prizes and game playing experiences available. For example, some games provide that a bank of gaming machines enter a group bonus mode in which higher value prizes are awarded. Other games provide a group event that is similar to a tournament, in which high value prizes are awarded to certain individual gaming machines that obtain better results while wagering in the group mode. Group bonuses are often triggered by some event at one or more of the gaming machines in the group, while tournament style group games may be scheduled.

[0004] Game manufacturers are continuously pressed to develop new game presentations, formats, and game graphics in an attempt to provide high entertainment value for players and thereby attract and keep players. What is needed are ways to provide both anticipation and excitement to players while providing more variability in game results.

### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention includes wagering games, gaming machines, networked gaming systems, and computer programs that provide improvements to group games played on slot machines or other gaming machines. A set of gaming machines enter a group gaming mode in which prize objects are displayed on a group mode game board and are available to be awarded to individual gaming machines in the set, and are then removed from the group mode game board. Primary game results at each of the set of gaming machines are presented through the group gaming mode.

[0006] According to one aspect of the invention, a method is performed with a group of gaming machines, each including one or more displays, a wager input device, and at least one electronic controller operatively coupled to the wager

input device and the one or more displays and configured to execute instructions for providing a wagering game. The method includes operating the gaming machines in a first mode in which wager results of a primary game are presented in a primary display area, and wager results have a chance of including bonus events including a presentation on a secondary display area of the one or displays. In response to a mode change event, the method includes operating a set of two or more of the gaming machines in a second group gaming mode in which the secondary display areas of the set of gaming machines include a common, persistent game board with a plurality of prize objects. The second group presentation mode includes (i) obtaining primary game results for wager activations at the set of gaming machines, the primary game results having a chance to include a prize amount, (ii) providing selected primary game results at least partially in the game board by awarding at least one of the prize objects and an associated prize amount to one of the group of gaming machines to provide the primary game result prize amount, (iii) for each prize object awarded, causing a message to be sent to the other gaming machines of the set that the at least one prize object has been taken, displaying an indication at the other gaming machines of the set that the at least one prize object is no longer available, and removing it from the game board, and (iv) when a prize object is awarded, maintaining available prize distributions of the primary game for all gaming machines in the set.

[0007] Another aspect of the invention is a gaming machine including a display, an audio device, a wager input device, and at least one electronic controller operatively coupled to the wager input device, the audio device and the display and configured to execute instructions related to the wagering game and to cause cash value credits to be awarded to a player in response to wagering wins. A tangible, non-transitory electronically accessible memory is connected to the at least one electronic controller and contains program code executable by the at least one electronic controller for performing the method.

[0008] Another aspect of the invention is a computer program stored on a non-transitory readable medium. The software version is, of course, typically designed to be executed by a gaming machine or networked gaming system. The software includes multiple portions of computer executable code referred to as program code. Gaming results are provided in response to a wager and displayed by display program code that generates simulated slot reels each including one or more symbol locations. The program also has game controller program code for determining game play results involving spins or other randomization of primary game presented through a first gaming mode and group gaming mode game presentations according to the method above.

[0009] Another aspect of the invention is a gaming system that includes one or more gaming servers, and a group of electronic gaming machines connected to the servers by a network, programmed to provide one of more of the methods described herein. The various functionality described herein may be distributed between the electronic gaming machines and the gaming servers in any practically functional way. For example, the current preferred architecture is for the servers to determine all aspects of game logic, random number generation, and prize awards. The gaming machines provide functionality of interfacing with the player